As a medical student, do you ever wonder what it’s like to be an ear, nose and throat (ENT) physician? Here’s your chance to find out.

Meet Christina Gillespie, MD, an ENT specialist and featured physician in AMA Wire’s® “Shadow Me” Specialty Series, which offers advice directly from physicians about life in their specialties.

Read her insights to help determine whether a career in otolaryngology might be a good fit for you.

“Shadowing” Dr. Gillespie

Specialty: Otolaryngology

Practice setting: Group practice (but I served in the U.S. Army as an ENT physician for 14 years).

Employment type: Private practice
Years in practice: 11 years

A typical week in my practice: I typically spend two-and-a-half to three days per week seeing patients in the office. I usually spend one day per week in the OR. I spend additional time seeing patients in the hospital. I typically work 8-12 hours per day during the workweek. I also work some weekends.

The most challenging and rewarding aspects of caring for patients in otolaryngology: I find the administrative burden of note writing and dealing with insurance companies the most challenging. The most rewarding is helping patients feel better.

Three adjectives that describe the typical ENT physician: Smart. Action oriented. Sociable.

How my lifestyle matches or differs from what I envisioned in med school: ENT doctors have reasonable hours. We spend most of our time seeing patients in the outpatient setting. I think I am able to maintain a good work-life balance. I also have a very helpful and supportive husband. We have a three–year-old child. Some evenings and weekends, he is the primary caregiver because I have to work. When we moved to New Jersey so I could start a new job, my husband took a year off from work to take care of our daughter and get us moved in and unpacked into our new house. He now works part time as a college professor, commuting twice per week to New York City and working from home three days a week. Our daughter started daycare at 14 months old. Before that, we kept her home. She is now in day care full time. The day care is down the street from where I work. I usually take her in the morning. My husband and I both pick her up depending upon our schedules.

One skill every physician in training should have for otolaryngology but won’t be tested for on the board exam: You need to be flexible. ENT physicians deal with a wide variety of problems and patients. We care for everyone from newborns to the elderly. You also need to be able to function well in stressful situations. While most of what we do is low stress, we are called to deal with emergencies, such as airway obstruction and epistaxis.

Advice for women medical trainees: I think gender impacts our specialty at the level of medical school. I think women are encouraged to become primary care providers like pediatricians and discouraged from pursuing surgical subspecialties. I always tell female medical students, become a pediatrician because you want to become a pediatrician. However, you have to love what you do. Women should lean into their careers. Do what you want. Do not make decisions because you may or may not get married or may or may not have children. A woman happy with her job makes a better wife and a better mother. Within the field, I think gender does not have a significant impact. Women otolaryngologists are becoming increasingly common.

One question physicians in training should ask before pursuing otolaryngology: Do they want a specialty that is a mix of both medical and surgical treatments for a wide variety of medical
problems?

Three books every medical student interested in otolaryngology should read:

- *Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery: Clinical Reference Guide* by Raza Pasha, MD, and Justin Golub, MD
- *Textbook of Head and Neck Anatomy* by James Hiatt, PhD, and Leslie Gartner, PhD

Online resources students interested in my specialty should follow: The website for the American Academy of Otolaryngology. Also, they should start working on their online professional social media profile.

One quick insight I’d give students who are considering otolaryngology: I think otolaryngology is a great specialty with a strong future, even with all the changes occurring in medicine.

If I had a mantra or song to describe my life in this specialty, it’d be: “Happy” by Pharrel Williams or “Welcome to the Jungle” by Guns and Roses. It kind of depends on the day!

Want to learn more about your specialty options?

- Read more profiles in *AMA Wire’s “Shadow Me” Specialty Series* to learn additional insights from physicians in such specialties as infectious disease, adolescent medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, radiology and orthopedic surgery, among others.
- Check out the AMA’s *Choosing a Medical Specialty* resource guide (member log in required).
- Be sure to avoid these 5 common mistakes students make when choosing a specialty.